What is claimed is:

1. A method for managing merchandise owned by a consumer, comprising:

receiving designation of merchandise owned by the consumer through a network; and

managing information relating to the merchandise owned by the consumer based on the designation.

2. The method according to claim 1, further comprising

automatically designating purchased merchandise as the merchandise owned by the consumer, and managing information about the purchased merchandise when the consumer purchases the merchandise through the network.

3. The method according to claim 1, further comprising:

receiving designation of unnecessary merchandise through the network; and

releasing designation of merchandise as owned by the consumer for the unnecessary merchandise.

4. The method according to claim 1, further comprising:

determining whether or not the consumer has already owned ordered merchandise according to information about the merchandise owned by the consumer when an order for merchandise is received from the consumer through the network; and

transmitting a determination result to the consumer through the network when it is determined that the consumer has already owned the ordered merchandise.

5. The method according to claim 1, further comprising:

receiving designation of merchandise not owned but ever used by the consumer through the network; and

managing information about merchandise ever used by the consumer.

6. A method for outputting a retrieval result after retrieving merchandise to a terminal of a consumer, comprising:

managing information about merchandise owned by the consumer; and

outputting the retrieval result to a terminal of the consumer according to information about merchandise owned by the consumer.

5   7.   The method according to claim 1, further comprising:

determining merchandise to be recommended according to information about merchandise owned by the consumer; and

10   transmitting information about merchandise to be recommended to the consumer through the network.

8.   The method according to claim 7, further comprising

15   transmitting information about the merchandise to be recommended and also input by another consumer when the recommendation is performed.

9.   The method according to claim 7, further
20   comprising when the merchandise is recommended:

classifying each piece of merchandise based on an attribute which is information indicating a tendency of taste; and

determining an attribute matching the taste of
25   the consumer according to information about

merchandise owned by the consumer, and transmitting information about merchandise classified into the determined attribute to the consumer.

5   10.   The method according to claim 7, further comprising:

removing merchandise owned by the consumer from merchandise to be recommended according to information about merchandise owned by the consumer
10   when the recommendation is performed.

11.   The method according to claim 7, further comprising:

when the recommendation is performed,

15   extracting a second piece of merchandise likely to be owned together with a first piece of merchandise by the consumer who owns the first piece of merchandise according to information about merchandise owned by the consumer and another
20   consumer; and

transmitting information about the extracted second piece of merchandise to the consumer.

12.   The method according to claim 7, further
25   comprising:

when the recommendation is performed,

classifying each piece of merchandise based on an attribute which is information indicating a tendency of taste;

5 determining an attribute matching a taste of the consumer according to information about merchandise owned by the consumer;

extracting merchandise which is likely to be owned together with merchandise classified into the

10 determined attribute, and is classified into an attribute other than the determined attribute according to information about merchandise owned by the consumer and another consumer; and

transmitting information about an attribute to

15 which the extracted merchandise is classified to the consumer.

13. The method according to claim 7, wherein:
said merchandise is a copyrighted article; and
20 said attribute is an author name.

14. The method according to claim 1, further comprising:

receiving information designating unnecessary
25 merchandise from a plurality of consumers;

collecting the received information about unnecessary merchandise; and

presenting a collection result to a buyer.

5   15. A method for distributing merchandise by collecting unnecessary merchandise while selling merchandise to a consumer through a network, comprising:

receiving information designating the
10   unnecessary merchandise from the consumer through the network; and

determining to collect the designated unnecessary merchandise when the consumer has ordered another piece of merchandise and the other
15   piece of merchandise is delivered to the consumer.

16. A method for providing information about merchandise to a consumer through a network, comprising:

20   collecting a document relating to each piece of merchandise based on a reference between documents in the network; and

transmitting information indicating a location of the collected document in the network to the
25   consumer together with the information about the

merchandise.

17. The method according to claim 16, further comprising in collecting the document:

setting a positive sample document group about given merchandise, and a negative sample document group about merchandise not much related to the given merchandise;

determining a document to be collected based on a reference of the positive sample document group and the negative sample document group; and

collecting a document to be collected from the network.

18. A method for managing owned merchandise, comprising:

transmitting information designating the owned merchandise to a server connected through a network; and

receiving the information about the owned merchandise based on the transmitted information from the server.

19. A storage medium storing a program used to direct a computer to control management of

merchandise owned by a consumer and perform a process comprising:

receiving designation of merchandise owned by the consumer through a network;

5   managing information relating to the merchandise owned by the consumer based on the designation; and

transmitting the information about the owned merchandise to the consumer through the network.

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20. A storage medium storing a program used to direct a computer to collect unnecessary merchandise while delivering merchandise to a consumer through a network and perform a process

15 comprising:

receiving information designating the unnecessary merchandise from the consumer through the network; and

determining to collect the designated

20 unnecessary merchandise when the consumer has ordered another piece of merchandise and the other piece of merchandise is delivered to the consumer.

21. A merchandise management apparatus which

25 manages merchandise owned by a consumer,

comprising:

a network connection unit connected to a network;

an owned merchandise management unit managing information about merchandise owned by the consumer at an instruction received from the consumer through the network.

22. A computer data signal embodied in a carrier wave storing a computer program used to direct a computer to control management of merchandise owned by a consumer through a network, and perform the process comprising:

receiving designation of merchandise owned by the consumer through a network; and

managing information relating to the merchandise owned by the consumer based on the designation.

23. A computer data signal embodied in a carrier wave storing a computer program used to direct a computer to collect unnecessary merchandise while delivering merchandise to a consumer through a network, and perform the process comprising:

receiving information designating the

unnecessary merchandise from the consumer through the network; and

determining to collect the designated unnecessary merchandise when the consumer has ordered another piece of merchandise and the other piece of merchandise is delivered to the consumer.

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